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Koning, J.B.M.; Verver, M.J.

published in

Entrepreneurship and Regional Development
2013

DOI (link to publisher)

[10.1080/08985626.2012.729090](https://doi.org/10.1080/08985626.2012.729090)

document version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication in VU Research Portal](#)

citation for published version (APA)

Koning, J. B. M., & Verver, M. J. (2013). Historicizing the 'ethnic' in ethnic entrepreneurship: The case of the ethnic Chinese in Bangkok. *Entrepreneurship and Regional Development*, 25(5-6), 325-348.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/08985626.2012.729090>

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Entrepreneurship & Regional Development: An International Journal

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/tepn20>

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Version of record first published: 04 Oct 2012.

To cite this article: Juliette Koning & Michiel Verver (2012): Historicizing the 'ethnic' in ethnic entrepreneurship: The case of the ethnic Chinese in Bangkok, *Entrepreneurship & Regional Development: An International Journal*, DOI:10.1080/08985626.2012.729090

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08985626.2012.729090>

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Historicizing the ‘ethnic’ in ethnic entrepreneurship: The case of the ethnic Chinese in Bangkok

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This paper aims to come to a better understanding of the meaning of ‘ethnic’ in ethnic entrepreneurship for second- and third-generation ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs in Bangkok, Thailand. Research on ethnic Chinese entrepreneurship in Southeast Asia typically investigates the dominance, attributed to specific ‘Chinese’ cultural values and strong intra-ethnic networks, of the ethnic Chinese in business and entrepreneurship. Our research among second- and third-generations shows an inclination of the interviewees to emphasize the irrelevance of their ‘ethnic’ Chinese background in entrepreneurship. To understand the meanings of the expressed irrelevance, we argue that it is constructive to incorporate a historical/generational approach of the ethnic group (migration history, nationalism) and of the business (social organization) into the study of ethnic entrepreneurship. The contribution to ethnic entrepreneurship research is threefold. Firstly, we show how a generational lens provides a more nuanced understanding of the ‘ethnic’ in ethnic entrepreneurship. Secondly, we show how incorporating the historical context helps to position business conduct in the social/societal experiences of entrepreneurs. Finally, our case study of ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs in Thailand brings an Asian perspective to ethnic entrepreneurship debates that generally concern European and North American research studies and thus hopes to inspire future comparative research.

Keywords: ethnic entrepreneurship; generational change; historical context; ethnic Chinese; Thailand

1. Introduction

‘The Chinese way of doing business means that you work very hard, you save a lot of money, and you do it yourself’. This quote from one of our interviewees highlights the theme of our paper: the meaning of ‘ethnic’ among second- and third-generation ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs in Bangkok, Thailand.¹

Ethnic entrepreneurship research still predominantly studies the experiences of the first generation (Rusinovic 2006). The few studies that have been conducted among second-generation ethnic entrepreneurs, however, suggest differences in terms of start-up motives, sector choice and/or embeddedness in intra- and inter-ethnic networks (Masurel and Nijkamp 2004; Gomez 2007; Koning 2007; Rusinovic 2008; Baycan-Levent, Nijkamp, and Sahin 2009; Zhou 2009). Such differences warrant

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further generational research, in particular because in many of the countries where ethnic entrepreneurship is manifest, such as the UK (Ram and Jones 1998; Ram and Smallbone 2003), the Netherlands (Kloosterman and Rath 2001; Baycan-Levent and Nijkamp 2009) and North America (Aldrich and Waldinger 1990; Light and Gold 2000; Zhou 2004; Mora and Davila 2005), there is a second generation which is active in entrepreneurship.

We are particularly interested in this second generation and in how they express ethnicity in relation to business conduct. Whereas there is an inclination in ethnic entrepreneurship literature to perceive of ethnicity as 'practice', we take the position that ethnicity is also mediated by societal interaction (see also Pecoud 2003), which complicates the straightforward understanding of ethnicity as a source to tap into for economic purposes. We do agree that in practice, ethnicity can be perceived to play a role in the socio-economic organization of firms (Ram, Theodorakopoulos, and Jones 2008); however, we consider ethnicity to be also negotiated and reproduced through social and state discourse. Incorporating this dimension into the analysis of ethnic entrepreneurship provides a more comprehensive understanding of the complicated relationship between ethnicity and entrepreneurship. It is among second (and third) generations that such complexity comes to the fore more clearly, thus highlighting that ethnicity is 'a wonderfully and strategically ambiguous term' (Souchoy 2009, 261).

To investigate the impact of societal and state discourse we will use an historical approach. We agree with Peters (2002) that historical legacies do not receive the attention needed in ethnic entrepreneurship research notwithstanding existing comprehensive ethnic entrepreneurship approaches such as the mixed embeddedness model (Kloosterman and Rath 2001; Kloosterman 2010). By exploring what it means to grow up in an entrepreneurial 'location' in which the migration experiences of the first-generation inform the entrepreneurial process, and how historically ethnic minorities are confronted with practices of inclusion and exclusion related to nation state policies, we will illustrate how ethnicity, in practice *and* discourse, reverberates with questions of entrepreneurship. Based on Giddens (1984), we recognize the knowledgeability of human agents set within the enabling as well as constraining structures of their day-to-day lives. As briefly mentioned above, we will do so for ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs in Bangkok, Thailand.

Although rarely part of debates on ethnic entrepreneurship in Europe or North America, there is a tradition of research on ethnic entrepreneurship in Southeast Asia, in particular so on 'the' ethnic Chinese (Redding 1990; Weidenbaum and Hughes 1996; Gomez 1999; Hamilton 1999; Chan 2000; Gomez and Hsiao 2001; Souchoy 2002; Menkhoff and Solvay 2004; Yeung 2004; Suryadinata 2006; Dahles 2010; Koning 2012). A key question in these debates is why ethnic Chinese, in many of the countries concerned an ethnic minority enduring past and present discrimination by the state and majority populations, have come to dominate the business sectors of the economies involved (Suryadinata 2006). Compared to European or North American scholarship, in Southeast Asia there is even less attention for the second or third generation, while the history of Chinese migration to Southeast Asia (Pan 1998) implies that in the majority of the cases second or third generations are the ones now active in business.

The field of ethnic Chinese entrepreneurship in Southeast Asia is therefore a relevant context in which to explore further *how* ethnicity matters for second- and third-generation ethnic entrepreneurs in their business conduct. The Thai case is

particularly relevant because, after a history of ‘hypernationalism’ (Tong 2010, 37), the ethnic Chinese are portrayed as ‘integrated’. Furthermore, the setting of Bangkok is intriguing because Bangkok is witnessing a ‘growing pride in China’s achievements’ (Vatikiotis 1998, 227) while also being an important economic hub in the region.

This paper continues with our theoretical position on embeddedness, generational change and ethnicity. Next, we discuss ethnic Chinese entrepreneurship research in Southeast Asia and provide historical context on the ethnic Chinese in Thailand. After explaining our qualitative research approach we present empirical findings followed by a discussion. In conclusion, we highlight the implications of a research focus on historical context and generational change for ethnic entrepreneurship research.

2. Historical embeddedness, generational change and ethnicity

To fully comprehend generational encounters among ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs in Thailand, we adhere to the embeddedness approach in entrepreneurship. This approach interprets entrepreneurship as a social activity to be understood from a contextualized perspective (Granovetter 1985). It has its legacy in the work of Polanyi (1944, 1957) who argued that economic decision-making in pre-capitalist societies is based on social relationships, moral issues and cultural values as opposed to capitalist societies that behave more ‘rationally’. It was argued that modernization would bring about the ‘dis-embedding of markets and the subordination of society to impersonal economic powers’ (Hefner 1998, 9).

Granovetter (1985) revived the notion of embeddedness in entrepreneurship studies by showing that capitalist societies *also* thrive on social relations. He rectified what he called over- and under-socialized conceptions of human action, arguing that ‘attempts at purposive action are instead embedded in concrete, ongoing systems of social relations’ (487). Being socially embedded support entrepreneurs in terms of advice, knowledge, contacts and information and as such assist them in identifying the necessary resources for founding a firm (Jack and Anderson 2002, 471).

Embeddedness in ethnic entrepreneurship has been advanced in particular when scholars started to question the exclusivity of ethnic resources, or ‘culture’, as major explanation of the growing presence of ethnic entrepreneurs. Kloosterman and Rath (2001) and Jones and Ram (2007) strongly advocated including the socio-economic (opportunity structures) and socio-political contexts (state regulation), arguing that ethnic entrepreneurship does not take place in an ‘insulated vacuum’ (Jones and Ram 2007, 452). The mixed embeddedness model subsequently developed by Kloosterman (2010, 27–8) combines the micro-level of the entrepreneurs, the meso-level of the local opportunity structures and the macro-level institutional context.

We propose that by including an explicit historical dimension, which permeates all three levels of the mixed embeddedness approach, it is possible to provide an extra layer of understanding of ethnic entrepreneurship. Such historical ‘location’ is in particular salient in the case of the entrepreneurial endeavours of ethnic Chinese in the Southeast Asian region. While often positioned as middleman between the European elite and the indigenous workers in colonial times, when independence was sought after the Second World War, the ethnic Chinese became treated as outsiders in nationalist discourses (Hefner 1998). Politically excluded and facing a hostile

environment, they had to establish themselves without much outside support. It is argued that through the creation of solidarity, horizontal ties, within their ethnic group they succeeded to develop themselves economically without dependence on the state or other ethnic groups in society (Bardsley 2003, 34). The question that becomes relevant is whether, with the fading away of part of these problems for the second and third generations, generational attitudes towards business practices and representations of ethnicity have changed.

This brings us to our interpretation of generations. In social-historical contexts in which generations are confronted by quite different experiences, such as migration trajectories or a mutating nationalism as in the case under study, it is useful to return to Mannheim's (1952) work on the problem of generations. He interpreted a generation as individuals who share a 'common location in the social and historical process' (Mannheim 1952, 291). Because of the different social and historical experiences and backgrounds to which the generations relate, new attitudes and new generational styles can develop. The concept of generational encounters, a juxtaposing of 'the young' versus 'the old' as developed by Down and Reveley (2004, 237) in entrepreneurship studies is a very useful translation of such 'location' sensitivity.

The third construct in our approach is ethnicity. We perceive of ethnicity as a mode of differentiation, as a classification of people describing their, or ascribing them, cultural characteristics, social position, organizational conduct, shared historical experience and so forth. After Barth's (1969) thesis on ethnicity as 'relational', Anderson's (1983) notion of 'imagined communities' and Eriksen's (2002) 'us' versus 'them' classifications, it is agreed that 'actual' ways of conduct and identifications within an ethnic category, and (re)presentations of ethnic identity do not necessarily correspond; ethnic identities are unstable, contingent and context dependent. There is thus clearly a move away from essentialist and primordial interpretations, but also an ongoing struggle with 'stereotypical' (Collins and Low 2010, 101) and 'homogenizing' views of ethnicity (Nederveen Pieterse 2007, 36).

Despite the importance of deconstructing essentialized notions we contend that it is fruitful to try and understand such essentialisms instead of sidestepping them as reified and imaginary constructs. Such critiques towards constructivist uses of the term 'ethnicity' or 'ethnic group' stem from what may be labelled 'sociological realism' (Carter and Fenton 2010, 10) or 'critical realism' (Bader 2001, 252). For example, Bader (2001, 255) points out that anti-essentialist constructivists, though rightly criticizing appeals to 'natural' distinctions in order to explain cultural differences, 'have difficulty in coping with the enigmatic "second nature" of objectified, crystallized human interactions and social relations'. After all, power-mediated discourses on ethnic culture to a considerable extent constitute ethnic identities (Nonini and Ong 1997, 9). Similarly, Carter and Fenton (2010, 7–8), after having identified the problems of 'the concept of ethnic groups as culture-containers', argue that 'ethnic categories are found in all social systems and actors deploy them as "practical categories"'.

From the above views, we propose to use a generational lens that takes into account social and historical processes. Combined with a perspective that perceives of ethnicity (a 'third way') as a dynamic template for both social organization and cultural representation (practice and discourse), it is feasible to arrive at a better understanding of how the entrepreneurs in our study use their expressed belonging to

a 'younger' generation as a way to construct their own ethnic identity as entrepreneurs with a Chinese background, and how this resonates with certain business practices.

3. The Southeast Asian context

In this section, we first introduce the debate on ethnic Chinese entrepreneurship in Southeast Asia. By necessity, it is a short state-of-the-art of the different positions within the debate. In the subsequent part, we position the ethnic Chinese in Thailand by looking at several historical developments that have shaped understandings of ethnicity in Thailand.

3.1. *Ethnic Chinese entrepreneurship in Southeast Asia*

The most prominent theme in social science research on the Chinese in Southeast Asia is their past and present ability to thrive in business. Since the 1990s, and in parallel with the rise of the 'tiger economies' of East and Southeast Asia, the ethnic Chinese have been portrayed as major engines in this regional economic success. In Southeast Asia, with the exception of Singapore, the ethnic Chinese are numerical and political minorities but hold a dominant position in the economic sphere (Yeung 2004, 13). This observation left scholars puzzling over explanations for ethnic Chinese business acumen, and the role ethnicity plays in economic endeavours.

While the Weberian view that Chinese culture was unsuitable for capitalism, due to a supposed lack of rationality and constraints imposed by religious values, was prominent until the 1970s (Jomo 2003, 10), subsequent decades have seen scholars debating how to explain the success of economies such as Singapore, Hong Kong, Korea and Thailand. Among other factors identified, the Chinese hard-working spirit, networking arrangements and respect for authority have been deemed to have played an important role in this regard (Redding 1990; Weidenbaum and Hughes 1996). However, characteristics assumed to boost prosperity were also brought forward as the cause for economic hardship, especially after the 1997 economic crisis that started in Thailand and spread throughout Southeast Asia. Thus, personalism was interpreted as nepotism and initially advantageous networks were labelled exclusive. Whatever the connotations, it is clear that some persistent viewpoints keep dominating our knowledge of an alleged Chinese way of doing business.

The debate on ethnic Chinese business acumen is particularly known for its dichotomy between cultural and critical approaches. The culturally inclined perspective on 'the Chinese way of doing business' argues that the Chinese traditionally attach much value to intra-ethnic ties, recognizable in the practice of family business in the first place. The use of family labour allows Chinese patriarchs to maintain a high level of trust and keep costs low. Second, the Chinese are also said to operate within *guanxi* networks that create valuable ties among ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs in society; ties which allow access to capital and social resources (Hefner 1998, 10–13) and create a context within which 'a person can capitalize on reciprocal obligation and trust implicit in strong social ties to facilitate the exchange of favours and informal influences outside the domain of the original social ties' (Ly-yun and Tam 2004, 24). In addition to these social mechanisms, the Chinese are said to possess advantageous cultural characteristics such as diligence, an emphasis

on education and moral obligations, entrepreneurial skill and loyalty. These supposed features, referred to as 'Confucian values', which are traced back to Mainland China, are used to explain key aspects of Chinese entrepreneurship. For example, it is argued that Chinese familism accounts for nepotism in the business sphere, and that *guanxi* networks serve to support the establishment of higher-trust relations within the Chinese community (Redding 1990; Fukuyama 1995). The culturalist perspective in our view represents an essentialist understanding of ethnic identity because 'Chineseness' is taken for granted as the label to describe the ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia and to explain their entrepreneurial dealings.

Several scholars display a more critical perspective. Gomez and Benton (2004, 17) contend, 'the development of Chinese enterprise cannot be understood as a function of Chinese culture, for cultural practices and identity are not the foundations on which enterprises are built or the reason they thrive'. They are consequently highly critical towards the culturalist perspective and even hold that the mythical understanding of Chinese common characteristics is capable of sparking ethnic conflict because these notions are a breeding ground for unjust ethnic stereotyping (Gomez and Benton 2004, 4). In similar vein, Ooi (2007, 120) argues that by 'packaging' Chinese culture, a 'shopping list of traits' is constructed that is reductionist and simplistic.

Critical scholars thus challenge the view that Chinese culture incites fixed patterns of business organization among the ethnic Chinese. First of all, Gomez and Hsiao (2001) show that there is quite some heterogeneity in Chinese business on the basis of company size, degrees of assimilation into Southeast Asian societies and relationships with the state. Second, Tong (2005) illustrates that the family centred Chinese firm is far from sustainable. Centrality in decision-making and the informal character of family firms create conflicts between relatives, notably in relation to the distribution of ownership and control and over inheritance issues. The family consequently often loses control over the enterprise because of the desire of younger generations for more transparency and formalization of business conduct (Gomez and Hsiao 2001). Third, migrants' descendants are perceived as rooted in Southeast Asia both politically and economically, and are said to cast aside ethnically based organizations (Gomez and Benton 2004).

The debate set out above clearly engages with 'ethnicity as practice'. The culturalist standpoint implies that Chinese ethnic identity is shared and coherent throughout the region because of similar business practices emanating from supposed cultural values. Critical scholars, in contrast, build on the notion that ethnic Chinese business practices are unstable and not necessarily shared among members of the ethnic category, thereby rendering ethnic discourse problematic (Woon 1998; Mackie 2000). Culturalist academics (and politicians) create a false image of the ethnic Chinese as 'others' opposed to the native communities of Southeast Asia, and in doing so amplify ethnically based nationalist discourse. In particular, critical scholars argue that ethnic Chinese are 'more concerned with their local contexts than with faraway ancestral lands', and are only identified as Chinese 'because they have been "othered" by indigenous compatriots' (Wee, Jacobsen, and Wong 2006, 381).

The critical approach is a welcome counterbalance to state-incited social differentiation in countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia, where the ethnic Chinese are placed outside of the national imaginary. Yet, we recognize a

problematic stance between the argument that ethnicity does not matter much in the way people act in socio-economic life, and the realization that ethnic identity is a stubborn notion always reappearing in reified representations of social categories, either in self-presentation or in representation by 'others'. Hence, we argue that an understanding of ethnicity in ethnic entrepreneurship must include practice and discourse.

3.2. *The ethnic Chinese in Thailand*

The presence of Chinese miners, peasants and merchants in Thailand is often related to social, political and economic upheavals in South China, the boom in tin, rubber and rice, expanding foreign trade and railroad building. This created a Chinese immigration surplus of 450,000 between 1882 and 1917, and of 500,000 between 1918 and 1931. The surplus slowed down to 250,000 (1932–1955) due to immigration restrictions (Montesano 2001, 139). Vatikiotis (1998) estimated that at the end of the twentieth century approximately 10% of the total Thai population of 60 million people were ethnic Chinese.

The position of the ethnic Chinese within the Thai nation-state is generally understood to have resulted in successful integration (Case 2009, 657). Skinner (1957) argued that the Chinese in Thailand would 'disappear' within two generations because of their incorporation in Thai society (Chan and Tong 1993, 148–51). Rather than assuming integration to be a spontaneous process, the blurring of the boundary between 'Chineseness' and 'Thainess' can only be understood within Thai nationalist discourse. Two waves of nationalism deserve our attention.

In the early twentieth century (1913–1925), the Siamese government began to implement ethnic policies under the reign of King Wachirawuth (Chantavanich 1997, 233). The core of his rhetoric was the hegemonic triad of nation, religion and monarchy. The attempts to unify the people under the royal patriarch were a reaction to the emerging resistance against the absolute monarchy and the ethnic Chinese became the needed 'others'. King Wachirawuth used the events of 1910, when the Chinese held a strike opposing increased taxes (Tejapira 2009, 266) to this purpose. By that time, there was a growing dependence of Bangkok society on Chinese merchants. The King began to install ethnic policies, which included the obligation for Chinese to obtain a Thai first and last name, and restrictions on Chinese associations with the goal 'to shame or frighten them into loyal submission and a symbiotic patron-client relationship with the state elite' (Tejapira 2009, 267). Some Chinese adopted Thai names but kept using their Chinese names within business circles.

The second and even harsher wave of Thai nationalism lasted from 1938 to 1950, under the reign of Marshal Phibun who changed the country's name from Siam to Thailand, thereby rendering the dominant Thai speaking population of the Chao Phraya delta hegemonic status. Fearing Chinese nationalism, and communism in particular, Phibun took forceful measures such as the closing of Chinese schools, taking over the remittances flow to China and deporting Chinese activists. At the same time Phibun gave the Chinese the opportunity to 'become Thai' and to show loyalty towards Thailand in the form of 'naturalization' (Chantavanich 1997, 244). The Chinese, by then forerunners of a rising middle class that challenged absolute authority, were an easily demarcated 'other' (Limmanee 1997, 260–6). The state's

moulding of Thai national consciousness foreclosed Chinese from gaining political power, but policies did not lead to a diminishing economic role of the Chinese, in large part due to patron–client relationships between Chinese businessmen and Thai government officials (Thomson 1993; Pongsapich 2001). What it did lead to in the 1960s and 1970s, boosted by US sponsored anti-Red China sentiments, was a ‘Thainess Deficiency Syndrome’ (Tejapira 2009, 271).

In the 1980s and first half of the 1990s, Thailand had a fast growing economy. With a rising middle class displaying a consumerist lifestyle, capitalist ideology challenged traditional Buddhist values, and those with Chinese ancestry were a main force for economic development. Globalization became the new paradigm and the ‘borderless’ world was assumed to open up many doors for the Kingdom. During the 1990s, Thai identity became commoditized. According to Reynolds (2002, 311), the boom years witnessed ‘the promotion of Thailand as a brand name; Thainess was no longer something to be defended in the interest of national security but to be consumed in the interest of boosting the economy’.

Whereas assimilation has by now disappeared from the agenda, ‘Thainess’, couched in cultural terms is omnipresent. In particular, King Bhumibol’s agenda of fusing imperial and Buddhist elements into a meta-narrative for the nation has provided the substance for the ‘Thainess’ discourse over the previous decades (Fong 2009, 691). The state has become more tolerant towards the ethnic Chinese, and notions of cultural diversity have even become part of discourse on ‘Thainess’ (Laungaramsri 2003, 171). It is to some extent telling that attempts by government officials to blame the ethnic Chinese for the 1997 economic meltdown, led to a public outcry in Thailand. As Callahan (2002, 25) asserts, ‘neo-nationalism not only includes the Sino-Thai, but also is largely formulated by them’.

Through exploring narrations on socio-business life of ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs in Bangkok, we will argue that the meaning of Chinese ethnic identity in entrepreneurship is intrinsically linked to the described historical context in which the construct of ‘Thainess’ is crucial to the collective consciousness.

4. Research approach

Our position as organizational anthropologists/ethnographers, rooted in an interpretivist approach, is quite apt to uncover how the entrepreneurs in our study, as knowledgeable actors, interpret their own and others actions and behaviour and give meaning to them (Berger and Luckmann 1967). Such an interpretive ethnography combines ‘an orientation toward subjective experience and individual agency in every day life with sensitivity to the broader social setting and the historical and institutional dynamics in which these emerge or are embedded’ (Ybema, Yanow, et al. 2009, 7). We understand human meaning making as constructed and negotiated (Schwartz-Shea 2006) and as a result we are more concerned with ‘description of persons, places and events’ than with an attempt to generalize across time and space (Janesick 1998, 50). Our research is therefore mainly aimed at uncovering patterns in the narratives that might inspire further theoretical thinking (Yin 2009), for instance on the relevance of including historical context into the study of ethnic entrepreneurship. As is argued elsewhere, identity-related research is best matched by an in-depth and contextual approach (Sveningsson and Alvesson 2003, 1165). At the same time, empirically, the use of narratives allow a researcher to capture identity

formation because it is in talk on self, others and society that identification takes the shape of dynamic and unfinished categories (Ybema, Keenoy, et al. 2009).

The data collection (2008) consisted of interviewing ethnic Chinese (and several Thai) entrepreneurs who work and live in Bangkok, combined with observations during social or business meetings. The interviews were in-depth, topic focused business-life histories, and discussed 'career-histories' (personal biography of the interviewee including education, work experiences, family life and identity) and 'business-histories' (the biography of the enterprise, family business and business networks), a merging of life and business biographies (Dahles 2004). Because the research was aimed at understanding how the entrepreneurs experience and give meaning to their entrepreneurial life, the interviewing process was flexible and iterative, reflecting after each interview whether the appropriate topics had been addressed and whether new topics had come to the fore that made it necessary to add new questions to the topic list. Also, enough room was left to the interviewees to address topics they found relevant.

Contact with the interviewees was established via an acquaintance (non-Sino-Thai) and by visiting a Christian Church attended by quite a number of ethnic Chinese. Snowballing was used to meet other potential interviewees. This is an appropriate method in our case, because of our unfamiliarity with the community as such, the explorative nature of our research, and the specific group we were interested in. Obviously, the study as such has limitations both related to this approach (referral of friends to friends, and probably the gender bias) as well as in numbers.

In this paper we draw on, the life-business stories of 10 ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs (Table 1). They all belong to the middle class in Bangkok. The majority is foreign educated, cosmopolitan in lifestyle and fluent in English. The group of interviewees is also uniform in terms of 'migrant history'. They are second or third-generation migrants in their thirties, forties or fifties whose parents or grandparents migrated from Southern China to Thailand, sometimes via such destinations as Singapore or Cambodia. Of the 10, only two are active in a family business; the others have either left the family business or did set up their own business from the very start. Except one, they are all from entrepreneurial families with parents who are or were active in business. Among the 10 entrepreneurs, five have a small business (less than 100 employees), two run a medium-sized company (110–250 employees) and three are owner-managers of a large business (more than 250 employees). The sectors in which they are active include trading/retail, services, manufacturing and wholesale. Six of the entrepreneurs have had an education abroad.

The interviews have been transcribed and systematically and repeatedly rearranged and analysed by identifying major themes. In qualitative research in which *word* data are crucial, the analysis involves listening to a variety of voices; the voice of the interviewee, the theoretical framework (interpretation) and that of the researcher (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber 1998). The analysis focused on expressions of 'Chineseness' and 'Thainess' in the narrations on business conduct and personal life histories. In the process of coding and analyzing, two kinds of findings were abstracted from these notions. The first category consists of notions on organizational and business practice and meanings of working life. These findings were bundled and subsequently related to the concept of ethnicity; ethnicity as practice. The second category consists of explicit notions of ethnicity based on

Table 1. Characteristics of second- and third-generation ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs.

Name (gender)	Generation	Age (2008)	Speaks a Chinese language	Study abroad	Business	Size of business (employees)
Dassakorn (M)	Second	53	Yes	Australia	Production (medical sectors) and textile	Large (1200)
Jirayut (M)	Third	33	Yes	–	Antique trade and retail	Small (2)
Winai (M)	Third	44	Yes	–	Trading (water filters)	Small (3)
Supaporn (F)	Second	55	Yes	USA	Investments	Small (7)
Jimmy Lee (M)	Second	49	Yes	USA and Hong Kong	Jewellery and restaurants	Large (380)
Satjaphol (M)	Third	36	–	–	Architecture and coffee shops	Small (1)
James Lee (M)	Second	45	Yes	USA	Service and cleaning and real estate	Medium (100)
Surakit Buttri (M)	Second	44	Yes	Australia	Management company, hotels and clubs	Large (360)
Nopphol (M)	Second	37	Yes	Australia	Distribution construction materials	Small (6)
Prasert (M)	Second	46	Yes	–	Production (trucks)	Medium (120)

Source: Own fieldwork data, Bangkok, 2008.

discussions of the concept itself and in relation to context; ethnicity as discourse. These data thus inspire the interpretation of the ethnic in ethnic entrepreneurship in our case according to practice and discourse.

5. Ethnic Chinese entrepreneurship in Bangkok?

In this section, we discuss how second- and third-generation entrepreneurs in Bangkok negotiate their ethnic Chinese background by positioning themselves in relation to 'the older generation', and in between Thai society and the rising Chinese economy. Table 2 gives a summarized overview of some of the more salient results.

5.1. *Generational change in business conduct?*

The debate on ethnic Chinese business acumen in Southeast Asia identifies hard work, thrift, saving and personal (family) networking as salient. The second- and third-generations interviewed are well embedded in Thai society and have had good education. Their parents or grandparents were the ones who migrated to Thailand from southern China and started to make a living from next to nothing. One of the interviewees (Winai) referred to the popular saying 'the Chinese came to Southeast Asia with a pillow and a small mattress, and went sky high'. This is a characteristic feature as explained by Dassakorn, who is active in the production of healthcare equipment.

Coming from South China, Chinese migrants tried to set up their own businesses, they struggled to make a living. I think that is the difference between the Chinese and the Thai. The Thai do not have that background, the hardship; the struggle for livelihood. [Dassakorn]

While the first-generation Chinese seem oriented towards making money and working hard, the second and third generations are differently inclined. Supaporn, who has worked all over the world, remembers the following from her childhood.

My parents were in all kinds of businesses; the typical Chinese way. They had an ice-cube factory, a gas station, a mini-market, and sold ducks. So, whatever business they could do, they did. When I grew up I saw them working very hard. I told my parents I did not want to do the same. I just do not want to work only for the money. When you have a small business you really have to focus and work hard to make money. I wanted to learn, do different things, and make money too. But it's not only about money. [Supaporn]

Also Jirayut, who has joined his father's antique business, a business developed by Jirayut's grandfather who came to Thailand from South China, agrees that his father's generation was focused on working hard, 'my father, he never takes a holiday, he also doesn't want to quit working. He is 75 years old now'.

There is consensus among the interviewees that the first-generation worked hard to make as much money as possible. They did not spend any of it on themselves, but reinvested their earnings in the company, in their children's education, or explored new business opportunities. Dassakorn, who temporarily worked for his father's nail production company calls this their entrepreneurial mindset: 'Chinese are always looking for opportunities to make more money'. According to Jimmy, who stepped into the jewellery company of his parents, the company is solid partly due to

Table 2. Family firm (familism), ethnic networks and venturing into China.

Name	Parents in business/continues family business	Relationship with older generation	Use of 'ethnic' network and background	Venturing into China
Dassakorn (M)	Yes/No	Stepped out of family business, is now independent	Knowledge and experience	Yes
Jirayut (M)	Yes/Yes	Works in his father's business, encounters generational differences	Capital Family labour Knowledge and experience	Yes
Winai (M)	No/No	Parents not in business, started his own company	–	Considering
Supaporn (F)	Yes/No	Never worked for her parents' business, wanted to be independent	Knowledge and experience	No
Jimmy Lee (M)	Yes/Yes	Works in family business, tries to change it from the inside	Capital Family labour Knowledge and experience	Considering
Satjaphol (M)	Yes/No	Started his own business separate from the family business	Knowledge and experience	No
James Lee (M)	Yes/No	Runs business separately from family business, but financially dependent	Capital Knowledge and experience	No
Surakit Buttri (M)	Yes/No	Runs business separately from family business, but financially dependent	Capital Knowledge and experience	Considering
Nopphol (M)	Yes/No	Never worked for parents' business	Knowledge and experience	No
Prasert (M)	Yes/No	Stepped out of parents' business, started his own company	Knowledge and experience	No

Source: Own fieldwork data, Bangkok, 2008.

his parents' frugality, often characterized as typical 'ethnic Chinese' business acumen.

We didn't have television until twenty years ago while everybody else already had black and white TV. My parents want to save everything. Financially we are very strong because we don't spend, and we don't borrow. I think it's because my grandparents migrated from China; they were very poor. So nothing is spent on luxury. I also save but not as strict as my parents. [Jimmy]

His brother James, who left the family business, explains,

The Chinese way of doing business means that you work very hard, you save a lot of money, and you do it yourself. But since the world is becoming more international, it has not been easy to hold on to the same concept. We have to learn how to compete and use international business techniques. My father is very traditional and has not yet passed control to the next generation. [James]

Most interviewees are indicating that the 'older' styles of ethnic Chinese business conduct no longer hold. Prasert, who set up his own truck company and whose brothers and sisters all have their own business relates: 'the old traditional Chinese business styles are still there but are getting less and less I think. Education brings new ideas'. Also James is arguing that the generation relying on informal networks is almost gone. 'We do things according to business studies, contracts and the law'. Jimmy's narrative is interesting in that he seems caught between wanting to change the jewellery company in a 'non-Chinese' way while also feeling safe in this Chinese way.

I want to employ an expert to become the MD of the company. But my father gets scared when he has to share power and wealth. To some extent I'm scared too, because in the Chinese way, everything is under my control so I know I won't go bankrupt. [Jimmy]

Generational change is clearly a prominent theme. However, as Jimmy's fear of losing control illustrates, generational change is not a synchronous process but also depends on 'cultural location' (such as the family enterprise), which might differ within one and the same generational group. This also comes to the fore in the narrative of Dassakorn who left the family business because of tensions with his brother. Dassakorn, with a degree in engineering from Australia, briefly joined the nail factory of his father. He is the youngest of seven children, three of whom were born in China before his parents moved to Thailand. His grandfather started a textile factory, taken over by Dassakorn's father and now, Dassakorn's eldest brother is general manager. Dassakorn's father also started a nail factory that is still run by family members. When Dassakorn was young, he and his brother helped his father running the factor.

Ten years ago I was asked to support the family business; I did so for two or three years. At that time we had to move our factory, from the old industrial estate area to a new area. Because of my engineering expertise my father asked my help. I also helped my brother run the business for more than a year but this was not a great success. There were seniority issues; you know I'm the younger brother. My way of running the business collided with those of my brother. He follows the more traditional Chinese way in my eyes. He wants to invest in this and that, projects that are beyond our core business. I said, no, we should focus on our core business. I felt uncomfortable under the umbrella of my brother. So I left the family business and let him run it, rather than having a big argument one day and an interruption of the business. [Dassakorn]

Of the nine interviewees whose parents run a family business, only two have joined this business (Jimmy and Jirayut). Mostly, the interviewees went abroad for education or work experiences and did not want to be involved in the family business after coming back to Thailand.

The cases reveal that notions of seniority, family loyalty, saving, hierarchy and informality are questioned. In two cases, this was less explicit or at least more ambiguous, that is, in the antique business of Jirayut and the jewellery company of Jimmy, the only two family businesses. In general the interviewees expressed they do not need or want the umbrella of the family anymore and prefer more independent interactions with the Thai labour market and society. However, interestingly enough in most cases the family (parents to children) provides start-up capital or resources (Surakit's hotel is built on the property that his father owns) while the importance of the family or ethnic network is expressed in terms of knowledge and advice (there is a lot of business expertise), and (trustworthy) information on business opportunities within this circle, as Jimmy relates: 'My uncle in London is a great business person, very smart, a lot of insights'. In the two family firms this goes further and includes extensive use of family labour.

The expressed business dealing of the second- and third-generation ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs in this study asks for a further exploration of the social and historical embeddedness of ethnic identities in Thailand.

5.2. *Outside China, inside Thainess?*

With the booming Chinese economy a heightened interest in doing business in China, and a revaluation of Chinese language and culture, has taken place. It is often suggested that the ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia will have several advantages if they embark on the Chinese market or at least will have specific sentiments about China. The interviewees all acknowledge the 'rise' of China. James explains that speaking Chinese languages was far from 'done' for a long time, but this is changing because of business opportunities. Most interviewees do recognize China's potential for the Thai economy in general and for business opportunities in particular. Winai, active in trading water filters, said: 'I like to go to some exhibitions because right now, China is a booming'. Dassakorn, also stresses this potential: 'China is a huge opportunity market for Thailand, or a good trade partner'.

Most of the interviewees speak a Chinese language to some extent, based on what they learned at home, and a few consider this helpful in terms of doing business. Nopphol, for example, who has lived, studied and worked in China, explains: 'I do not have business relationships based on family relations, but speaking Chinese creates a connection more easily'. But, language alone is not enough, as Jimmy and James explain. At one time, Jimmy was invited by the Chinese government to start producing the jewellery in China but he was not impressed by the circumstances he encountered in China and decided not to. James was even less enthusiastic.

China is dangerous to move into because...I know I'm Chinese, but the people in China they...I don't know...are difficult...I don't know if it's the right word to describe them, but at least not very easy to do business with. [James]

In general, the interviewees realize that business manners of Mainland Chinese and Thai Chinese differ substantially. The relevant observation regarding interviewees' perceptions of and attitudes towards China is that China is not particularly

relevant, except for possible business ventures or in case of distant relatives. It is however, quite self-evident that Thai with a Chinese background celebrate Chinese New Year, but according to some this might disappear in the long run.

It's definitely a big thing. Last month I've been south to my mom's house. Thai who have a Chinese background they all celebrate it. For my parents' generation it's still a big thing, but the younger generations do not care much about tradition anymore. It will fade away. [Winai]

Interviewees approach China as Thai, an observation that renders notions like 'Chinese Diaspora' or 'overseas Chinese', labels implying a certain belonging in and loyalty towards China, questionable. Positioning oneself outside China runs analogously to a positioning inside 'Thainess', which James feels is desirable.

When the Chinese moved to Thailand, they respected Thai culture and loved to speak Thai because it's good for unity. If you move to another country you have to respect the culture, otherwise you create a lot of conflict. [James]

By means of emphasizing integration, the interviewees explicitly position themselves as Thai. Within the discourse on 'Thainess', a deeply ingrained notion of pride in the Thai nation and its culture and history can be found; a context in which quotes on integration must be understood. Ethnic classifications within this context are, to say the least, not desirable, as becomes tangible when Surakit was asked about employment practices within his company.

We have many nationalities working here. Of course, locals are Thai, but Thai are mixed with Chinese. They do not claim to be Sino-Thai; they are just Thai. Nobody says, 'oh, I'm Chinese-Thai', nobody says that. But if you ask about people's background, in Bangkok more than 80% has some Chinese blood. We don't discriminate on nationality; we just look for those who are best for the job. [Surakit]

Interviewees felt they had to emphasize that Chinese and Thai get along very well, that ethnic Chinese speak Thai and are actually 'common' Thai. Prasert asserts: 'I think Thai culture and Chinese culture are very close because uh, China and Thailand had contact for a long time', and Jirayut relates: 'We get along with Thai people very well. Chinese people just celebrate Chinese New Year to give respect to their forefathers'. And Surakit stresses: 'I'm Thai too, so what's the problem? What's the difference? Chinese don't think, also my wife, she does not think she's Chinese at all'.

The interviewees thus sketched a picture in which the relationship between Thai culture and institutions, and the ethnic Chinese has hardly caused problems because of Thai cultural notions such as generosity and respect, the warmheartedness of the royal family and Buddhism. According to Surakit: 'I think one of the reasons is the King and his acceptance of Chinese-Thai'. And Supaporn relates: 'I think Buddhism has a lot to do with it; it really welcomes foreigners. Buddhism is very easy going'. However, the majority knows the history and the 'bitterness' the ethnic Chinese encountered before it could become like this. Supaporn has quite an elaborate view on this integration.

At that time [first half of the twentieth century], the communists were very active in Thailand. What Phibun realized, was that the Chinese who want to live in Thailand should become Thai. The Chinese who wished to stay had to change their names into Thai and stop learning Chinese. He ordered to close all Chinese schools. My parents enrolled us in a Thai school and changed names. The way to solve it is to say: 'you're here, everybody is Thai, period'. It might have been bitter for my parents that they could

not teach their children their own language or maintain their own name, I don't know; I was still a child. The Chinese were afraid that if they didn't become Thai they would be exiled. So what choice did they have? They had no option, but nobody forced them to come to Thailand in the first place. Anyway, it worked out well because sixty years later there is no discrimination in Thailand; Thai love Chinese and the other way around. That's the secret. Chinese has become a foreign language but now a lot of schools teach Chinese again. This not about 'back to our roots' but related to the idea that China will become a major power in the world. [Supaporn]

From the above it becomes clear that differences between Thai and ethnic Chinese are strongly 'under-communicated'. What are the reasons for constructing a Thai identity that transcends ethnicity (or the relationship between Thai and ethnic Chinese) and how does it relate to the discourse and practice on business conduct?

6. Discussion: Historicizing the ethnic in ethnic entrepreneurship

There are three main trends to be discovered in the narratives of the second- and third-generation ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs of our study: a questioning of the so-called Chinese way of doing business, an ambivalent, if at all, business interest in China, and an urge to point out the integration of the ethnic Chinese into Thai society. We will discuss these dimensions one by one in order to reveal their meaning.

Through a generational discourse on business practices interviewees reacted against what is taken to be 'the Chinese way' of doing business. They attributed characteristics assigned to 'the Chinese way', such as hard work, intra-ethnic networking and family business to previous generations (that of their parents and grandparents) while expressing different motives and desires for themselves. The hard work and frugality of the older generations is explicitly connected to the migration histories with which the second and third generations have grown up. The narratives allude to a storyline in which the older generation left miserable circumstances in China and started their new lives with nothing in an insecure environment. They had to work hard to make ends meet and did everything in their power, such as taking up all kind of business opportunities, reinvesting and saving, to provide for a better future for their children. The hard work of the parents created more resources and educational opportunities for the younger generation but is also experienced as problematic in terms of traditionalism in business conduct, closed networks and power and control issues.

Such generational encounters (Down and Reveley 2004) can be seen as expressions of changing ethnic identity constructions. It accentuates that ethnic Chinese business culture is not stable and persistent, but rather changeable and particularly context dependent. This is something else than arguing, as the critical scholars in the Southeast Asian debate tend to do, that culture as such is not relevant (Gomez and Hsiao 2001) or as the culturalist have it, that ethnic Chinese businesses particularly thrive on 'Chinese' cultural values (Redding 1990). The narrative of the migration history provides a more nuanced understanding. Previous generations conducted business in an unwelcoming environment, while the interviewees themselves with educational and career opportunities, operate in a more formalized and international business world in which they, above all, feel rooted (Gomez and Benton 2004). It is therefore not surprising that notions assigned to 'the Chinese way

of doing business' are critically assessed, with interviewees stressing that they seek different challenges in business life than their parents, and prefer professionalism and self-fulfilment to hard work and purely money-making, which they sometimes perceive as tedious.

The family as pivot in the organization of business life and familism as an ethnic Chinese business characteristic was also questioned. The majority of the interviewees decided not to work for the family business because of authority and seniority issues and because of different ideas about business development. Those who are active in the family firm do challenge what they perceive as the inflexible and stifling structures of the family business but seem more inclined to follow existing patterns. Notwithstanding such questioning of 'the Chinese family firm', most of the interviewees do rely on the family in terms of finances (start-up), and in terms of trustworthy expertise information. Such results ask for a more nuanced and contextualized understanding of how ethnicity matters. Existing explanations of ethnic Chinese entrepreneurship in Southeast Asia often ignore the ambiguities of ethnicity, of 'Chineseness' that is, and therefore cannot grasp the 'radical changes in the boundaries and essences of Chineseness' (Reid 2009, 199).

We must, therefore, be careful with rigid formulations of ethnic identity and the relevance of 'Chineseness' in economic life (Chan 2000; Yeung 2004; Wee and Wah 2006). At the same time, in daily manifestations of entrepreneurship in Southeast Asia essentialist formulations of ethnic identity are experienced and expressed. To understand such essentialism in ethnic identity politics 'in the field' we must explore in more detail how such depictions come about and what they imply for entrepreneurial experiences.

A more comprehensive understanding of ethnicity thus requires us to look beyond the practice (social organization) to explore how representations (discourse) of ethnic identity impinge on these experiences and the manner in which they are recounted. This dimension is especially tangible in the narratives on the relationship with China and on issues of integration. These narratives, we contend, do not stand alone, but must be seen in a context in which pride in the Thai national identity, or 'Thainess', is the incontestable norm (Fong 2009).

As shown above, the interviewees displayed a matter-of-fact attitude towards the growing Chinese economy and the additional business opportunities associated with this growth, and in doing so displayed scepticism towards doing business in China and emphasized the different attitudes of Mainland Chinese compared to the ethnic Chinese in Thailand. Indeed, the interviewees, all born in Southeast Asia, hardly had any connections in Mainland China based on relatives or legacies that they could exploit. Interviewees did recognize that the Chinese market offered opportunities for the Thai economy, but did not reveal any personal relatedness with these developments. Despite the absence of expressions of resinicization among the interviewees, resinicization is taking place in Thailand (Tejapira 2009, 276). Appreciation of China's growing influence, and the subsequent revaluation of Chinese language and culture, is indeed being noted (Vatikiotis 1998, 226–7). For the interviewees, however, this brings us to the third theme in this study, stressing Thai identity seemed more compelling than dwelling on relations to China or ethnic Chinese identity. Whereas Chinese cultural events are celebrated and seen as important, it is expressed that this will probably disappear with the next generations to come.

There was a strong tendency among interviewees to emphasize that ‘the’ ethnic Chinese are highly integrated in Thai society. Acts of sympathy from the royal family, the Buddhist character of the society and Thai culture more generally were all mentioned as contributing factors. In the first half of the twentieth century, for reasons outlined earlier, those with a Chinese background encountered harsh measures to confine Chinese culture and nationalism. While at that time, combined with the communist threat, Chinese ethnic identity was positioned diametrically opposed to ‘Thainess’, in more recent decades ethnic Chinese are, by themselves, but also by others, identified as Thai. The compromise needed for such a construction might be found in the economic sphere. Since ethnic Chinese are generally classified as entrepreneurial and business oriented as opposed to native Thai who are public servants and in employment more often (Chan and Tong 1993; Hewison 1996), it is plausible that in times in which modernization, economic growth and consumerism were prominent, ethnic Chinese business acumen was quite appreciated. Incorporating the ethnic Chinese in ‘Thainess’ was thus in everybody’s best interests from the 1960s onwards (Reynolds 2002, 311). The fact that the interviewees in our case belong to Bangkok’s higher economic strata reinforces this claim.

However, it is important to stress that in Thailand, nationalism, or in Tongs (2010) words hypernationalism, is, perhaps, the most perceptible social concept. In this context, it is not surprising that the ethnic Chinese position themselves ‘inside Thailand’ and ‘outside China’. It calls for a recognition that ethnicity is used as a ‘political construct’ to legitimize ethnic-based state policies (Gomez 2006). The pervasiveness of Thai nationalism that triggers the downplaying of ethnic minority status has also been noted among Thailand’s Northern Khmer, whom Vail labels an ‘invisible minority’ (Vail 2007, 122). Thus, essentialized ethnic identities in the shapes of ‘Thainess’ and ‘Chineseness’ mediate the narratives of the younger generation and bears on their processes of identification, both in personal as in business life.

7. Conclusion

This paper explored the meaning of ethnicity among second- and third-generation ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs in Thailand. The aim was to come to a better understanding of how ethnicity matters, or not, for second- and third-generations ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs in their business conduct. The paper developed out of a critique on the debate on ethnic Chinese entrepreneurship in Southeast Asia that is fixed on the question whether ‘Chinese’ culture is (cultural position) or is not (critical position) an important explanatory factor for particular business conduct. This also summarizes our critique on ethnic entrepreneurship research more in general that focuses on ethnicity as practice (resource) and seems to have less attention for another dimension of ethnicity, namely how ethnicity is presented and represented in societies (discourse). Therefore, we introduced a historical and generational perspective that perceives of ethnicity (a ‘third way’) as a dynamic template for both social organization (practice) and cultural representation (discourse), in order to arrive at a better understanding of how the entrepreneurs in our study use their expressed belonging to a ‘younger’ generation as a way to construct their ethnic identity as entrepreneurs with a Chinese background, and how this resonates with certain business practices.

The narratives, collected through an organizational anthropological study, show that although something of ‘a Chinese way’ of doing business – networking, hard work, saving, reinvesting and central control – is acknowledged and at times also adhered to, it is perceived as practices that belong to ‘older’ generations. At the same time, interest in China for business purposes was disconnected from personal pasts, and the interviewees stressed they are actually ‘just’ Thai.

The stories thus show a more complex picture; the ethnic Chinese background, or something of an ethnic Chinese identity, does and does not matter at the same time. It is in particular the generational lens, the first contribution of this paper that reveals such discrepancies in the manners in which the ethnic Chinese background plays out in entrepreneurship. By analysing the narratives of a single (younger) generation rather than comparing different generations, we have been able to move beyond more common either/or explanations that argue that ethnicity does matter for the older generations but not really – or differently – for the younger generations (as showcased in the more generational/comparative ethnic entrepreneurship literature). We, however, discovered an and/and position, in which ‘ethnicity’ does and does not matter at the same time for second- and third-generation ethnic entrepreneurs. This suggests a non-dual synthesis; the blending of ‘new and different’ business practices with ‘old and tested’ ones. However, this is not simply a strategic business practice but must be understood in context.

A further understanding of this and/and ontology lies in historical contextualization, our second contribution. Two historical developments in particular stand out. First of all, the migration history as experienced and as incorporated into the business practices (‘hard work’). Second, processes and discourses of nation building and nationalism in the society in which the ethnic Chinese settled down (hypernationalism, erasure of Chineseness; ‘we are just Thai’). Both point to the cultural politics of ‘Chineseness’ and ‘Thainess’ and how, over time, both the nation-state apparatus as well as the entrepreneurs create, deploy, circumvent, reshape and interpret essentialized constructs of ethnic identity.

The notion of ‘historicizing’ used in our paper thus concerns the positioning of the narratives of the younger generation about Chinese business or ethnic Chinese entrepreneurship in a historical context (one that they construct themselves). We argue that the experiences and entrepreneurial choices of these entrepreneurs only make sense when positioned *vis-à-vis* the overarching migration history, in terms of a collective memory that spans many generations, and within historical notions of Thai nationalism of which they talk and in which their ethnic identity and that of earlier generations willingly and/or unwillingly took shape. In short, a generational/historicizing approach advocates a narrated historical embeddedness or contextualization of ethnic entrepreneurs as relevant for understanding business conduct.

The notion that younger generations express a non-dual synthesis regarding how ethnicity matters in their business conduct is most probably not restricted to the ethnic Chinese in Thailand. There are indications that similar processes are at play in other Southeast Asian countries. The question is, will it also be the case elsewhere, such as in Europe and North America, where the second and third generations are active in entrepreneurship as we established in the introduction. Therefore, further research, in different regional settings, is needed to explore whether indeed migration histories and ethnic policies and discourse at nation state level (either as part of

nation state building or as part of multicultural developments) provide us with more nuanced understandings of ethnic entrepreneurship. Such comparative research could at the same time explore how the cultural-critical standpoints in the ethnic Chinese entrepreneurship debate in Southeast Asia relate to the ethnic-class positioning in European ethnic entrepreneurship discussions.

Acknowledgements

The authors gratefully acknowledge the insightful comments of the anonymous reviewers, which have substantially sharpened the arguments developed in this paper.

Note

1. We use the term ethnic Chinese throughout this paper following academic terminology for ethnic Chinese entrepreneurship studies in Southeast Asia. The term is contested, however, in particular if we study the second and third generations for whom the label ethnic is more complex and who might prefer other labels (Sino-Thai or Thai). Our research group includes owner-managers of businesses and managers in organizations; we will use the term entrepreneurs for both groups since they are all involved in innovative business practices (Gartner 1989; Burns 2006).

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